

WASHINGTON, DC—Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) defended rural Oregon counties when he included funding for Secure Rural Schools legislation (also known as “county payments”) in the stimulus bill being considered by the House of Representatives today. Unfortunately, after having spent much of the day complaining that a reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools legislation was not included in tax legislation or economic stimulus bills under consideration, Republicans objected to the program’s addition to the bill. Consequently, the Secure Rural Schools reauthorization was excluded from the package voted on by the House.

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“This is extraordinarily disappointing to me, and devastating to counties in Southwest Oregon,” DeFazio said. “For the second time in four months, House Republicans have killed an opportunity to reauthorize this program. This is political posturing, plain and simple. After two days of asking the Majority to waive the rules of the House and attach county payments to various bills, Chairman Obey asked for unanimous consent to include county payments in the economic stimulus package, but Republicans objected. This program expired when the Republicans controlled the House, the Senate, and the White House, in June they voted against a 4 year reauthorization of the bill as a stand alone measure because it would have required oil companies to pay more royalties and now, today, the Republicans have stone-walled this unanimous consent motion and the program will very likely end.”

“The end of county payments means 8,000 teachers, thousands of sheriffs, police, and public safety officers have been laid off across America. People will die because these payments aren’t being extended,” DeFazio continued. “I am shocked, I am stunned, I am devastated.”

The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act expired in 2006 on President Bush’s watch with a Republican-controlled Congress. Last year, the Democratic Congress gave counties a one-year extension while we continue to work on a longer-term solution. The county payments program provides nearly \$280 million a year to 33 Oregon counties for services like schools, roads, and law enforcement. Counties receiving funding under the program have a high proportion of federally owned lands within their borders. Prior to

the enactment of the county payments program, counties received a percentage of receipts from timber harvests, which fluctuated from year to year. However, harvest levels decreased precipitously in the late 1990s due to changes in federal forest policy. Congress passed the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act in 2000 to help stabilize these payments and ensure proper funding for vital county services.